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JUN 28 1950

The Veteran and His Family

A SERIES OF THREE PAPERS

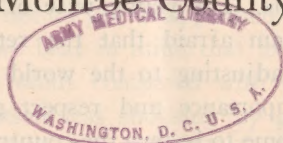
**FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY TO THE
RETURNING VETERAN.** Dr. S. S.
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**THE RETURN TO FAMILY LIFE AND
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Presented to the
NAVY LEAGUE MOTHERS' CLUB

By Members of the
**Mental Hygiene Society of
Monroe County**



ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Acknowledged

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY TO THE RETURNING VETERAN

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The country has a responsibility to the returning Serviceman as a group; the family has individually and as a group.

Responsibility means to answer a call for help, originally it meant "to promise." We promise help and we have to prove trustworthy. The demand is for sacrifice, consideration, adaptation, and particularly patience, in dealing with the returning Serviceman. Patience for the sake of all. We shouldn't forget, furthermore, that it is necessary for the sake of justified self-interest also.

Each member of the family, as an individual, has a certain emotional and interest relation with the Serviceman. Each member should know about possible personality changes of the returning soldier and it is good that each member of the family should know how to deal with those changes which are either transitory or may be permanent.

Besides being individuals all the members compose a primary group, the family, which the Serviceman returns to. He is tied by thousands of delicate threads to this group and he has to live with the group after he has returned. The family as a perfect team can, and therefore should, know how to treat him, how to handle him, and especially *How To Bring Him Again Back Into The Family Group Where He Belonged Before Duty To His Country Put Him In A Perfectly Different Group, the Army.*

I am confident that the expected difficulties caused by the returning Serviceman are exaggerated. In the majority of cases both the returning man and the members of the family will successfully cope with the difficulties. Their good sense, guided by the life instinct, the instinct for self-preservation, will give them heart and mind to straighten out the troubles. On the other hand there can be no doubt that many cases will need special care and consideration.

We should know that many returning Servicemen—and I think, to a certain extent, justly—consider themselves as heroes who suffered hardships, risked their lives and want their wives and families to appreciate their credits. Moreover, they might expect from now on certain privileges from fate. They feel that they suffered enough and from now on have the right to be exceptions. The young wife of an army flyer lieutenant recently wrote me, "I am afraid that the returning soldier will also encounter difficulties in adjusting to the world outside his family. The officer will miss the importance and respect given his wartime rank, will in some cases have come to believe the country should hand him things on a platter."

The family should give the returning Serviceman ample credit for

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his services to the country. The family should acknowledge this, appreciate him, and reward him by giving him respect and honor. But on the other hand—in proper and kind way—he should be reminded and should realize that his wife was a heroine too, that other members of the family were frustrated as well—and that his community brought sacrifices too. Furthermore, he should realize that what he did was his duty, that the fulfillment of his duty is already—at least partially—a reward, and that everybody has to accept all chances of life without becoming resentful and antisocial.

In another passage of her letter, the above-mentioned young lady writes, "My main worry is that my husband will learn so many weighty things that I cannot understand without knowing first hand, that he will have to withhold that part of himself from me. This will put up part of the barrier. More of a barrier still will be built when he returns from combat and he realizes that I have not changed—I am not what he idealized in memory; and also I am interested in things which will seem frivolous to him after he has seen death and bloodshed, starvation, and the other tragedies of war." Well, I am sure she speaks for millions of wives. It is true that separation causes the idealization of the persons who were torn away from each other. The wife, the family remained home while the soldier was overseas among strangers. He may not even have had any associations with women. He paints a halo around the head of his wife, idealizes her, puts her on a high pedestal, and faces disappointment when he meets reality. To a certain extent, the same goes on in the mind of the wife. Both have an apprehension that they won't live up to the highly idealized other one.

Such a situation will cause only temporary trouble in fairly well balanced persons, or no troubles at all if one is prepared. The family members should read about the places the Serviceman has fought. They should know as much as possible about other countries, the people who live there, their lives, their institutions. They should be interested in his stories. After all, he is relating real stories, history, sometimes more interesting than fiction. In case there is an overidealized picture in the minds of the persons involved, both parties should enjoy this stage of the life. It won't last too long; on the other hand they should be prepared for the change in order not to get disappointed by it. Life changes and we change with it. If we bear in mind that to the Serviceman life here at home might seem frivolous compared with what he has experienced we can make the transition less shocking by giving him only in small doses the realities of the homelife. The idealization of both parties won't cause difficulties; it will be rather beneficial. It is good to feel sometimes that beyond the earthy realities of life deep in our heart we carry heavenly

sentimentalities, love, respect, and devotion. Both learn through bitter and hard tasks what a treasure they possess in the other. How much it means to belong to somebody, to many, to a group. All will learn more and more to appreciate this feeling and keep it alive as much as possible.

Most of the soldiers have superiors. The permanent contact with superiors might revive a childhood affection similar to that of a father and son. The soldier depends on his superior; he is devoted to him because he gave him attention, consideration behind which is human love. It gives him emotional safety when the army moves and compensates him for other frustrations, and when he returns home he might miss this gratification even without knowing what he is missing. He himself might not understand why he is dissatisfied when he finally achieved what he was craving for and dreaming of: to return to his country, to his family. In my opinion, this emotional attachment will cause most of the troubles in the returning Serviceman, strange as it may sound. As a good countermeasure, it is advisable to understand such an emotional state, listen with interest and without boredom or jealousy to what the returning man has to say about his superiors. He might mention them very often, quote them, refer to them. One should take it. It might be even interesting. There is nothing more interesting than people. Furthermore, it would be advisable to maintain some sort of communication between the Serviceman and his superiors in the form of correspondence, meetings, radio-addresses, special journals, etc.

Deeper than the relation of the man in service to his superior is his friendly relation to his comrades-in-arms. They were close together long, long months—shared hardships, sorrows, joys, and participated in endless talks, exchanged their cravings, hopes, fears, and daydreams. Such friendships between men might have become very deep and forceful. Separation from his comrades might cause socially dangerous reactions and severe difficulties in adapting himself and his life to his family, and especially to his wife. I emphasize again that this is a very important—usually unconscious—motif in the life of the returning Serviceman. We should know about this, think of it, and offer help. He should be given the opportunity, if he wants to, let's say once a week, to meet other men from the services, especially if there are those who served with him. They should exchange memories until new impressions and experiences will replace the older ones. Wives and families should understand this. The wife shouldn't show jealousy; rather, she should support him, encourage him to go and to leave the home for one evening and meet his friends.

Emotional relations are manifold. Many Servicemen might harbor in themselves bitter hatred toward a superior or comrade. They bring this hatred home and transfer it to other persons. We call this trans-

ference, one of the most important and common psychological phenomena in personal relations. Due to this the returning Serviceman is compelled to find an object on whom he can gratify this hate. If you all will bear this in mind then you will understand if the returning Serviceman—after establishing himself in his family or in a job, and after getting in contact with authorities, with superiors, or friends—develops an enmity, a hostile attitude toward others. He will be very sensitive, easily hurt, resentful, and may even become convinced that he is right—take a violent attitude. A proper attitude to this will save you many troubles. If you have listened to him you may have learned that he hated certain persons while in service and you can remind him—in a kind, understanding way—that the present feelings were already in him, that he brought this attitude from the service, and in this way he will be able to separate the past from the present. Don't teach him. Don't tell him that he is right or wrong; you should only help to make him understand himself.

In her loneliness the wife of the Serviceman adopted certain living habits and attitudes. For example, to read late into the night, to eat in restaurants, to go out with other girls, to go out with a man on a purely social basis. She worked somewhere, got on good friendly relations with other men among whom she worked. The husband coming home might not understand this or he might misinterpret it. The returning Serviceman also has adopted his own habits, seemingly small but emotionally important things.

Marriage is a constant mutual adaptation and consideration for each other for the sake of happiness and advantages of married life and for living in a family unit. If both parties think of the mentioned possibilities they will be able to talk over their habits, they will be able to do their best and either they will give up certain habits, customs, etc., or they will share them. The wife should meet the friends of her husband if he wants her to, and she should suggest that he meet her friends so that he may see the nice people she has been associated with—if they are nice and decent and he wants to meet them. You might, this way, dissipate certain suspicions he carries in his mind.

Most married women see many instances of unfaithfulness; know that their husbands are friends of men who break marriage vows, and of single men who associate with prostitutes. They begin to lose trust and think that they will probably never believe in their husbands' chastity during the period of their separation, even though it be proven.

Wives of returning Servicemen should refrain from such an attitude. Even if he has become somewhat impressed by the loose conduct of others, one shouldn't assume that this impression was deep. And, in case it was, please believe me that I have had the opportunity to look into the hearts

and minds of men, and have found that they get tired and disgusted by it. Human beings are basically decent. They might fail, they might fall and sin, but at the bottom everybody wants to love and be loved. The basis of love is trust and for this trust sooner or later the man will change and leave behind him those experiences as a bad dream—if he had them. Don't ask him questions about this subject; let him talk, give him time for the realization, by himself and not by nagging at him, for self-judgment and self-correction.

Sexuality is a mighty drive and if there is sexual relation between two persons, as in marriage, it reflects the whole character of the interpersonal relations. Perfect sexual gratification is impossible unless the two persons harmonize socially, morally, and emotionally. Under gratification I do not mean only physiological but also emotional and even moral gratification through the proper sex relation. Frustration by separation might disrupt the ideal fusion between sexuality and personality; this, in succession, brings out of emotional and physiological kilter both parties and might bring to the rocks the marriage in a few weeks after the man returns and sexual life is resumed. This can be avoided. The wife should first realize that long frustration may have impaired the normal functioning of the man; he may feel and behave clumsily, and an improper gesture or word from her might even paralyze him toward her. Experience proves that such troubles disappear in a few weeks. I have to emphasize again and again, that sexuality isn't a thing for itself: it is one of the functions closely connected with all other basic functions of both parties. After social and emotional relations become harmonious, the normal sex function will follow.

Many wives also are learning that their husbands are not the strong men they believed, either spiritually or mentally. Men who were interested before in family security lose their aims and become carefree about them—learn to drink and to gamble. This not only disillusion the wife “back home,” but makes her feel that he doesn't care about her any more and is no longer dependable. I am sure that these fears and assumptions are exaggerated. I advise again that one should give time to the returning Serviceman for realization that the joys and gratifications drinking and gambling secure for him are superficial. The wife through her clever silence should serve for him as a model and living conscience. No reproaches, no moral teachings from her side; just silence, kindness, and serving as a good example for him. This will do the work in most of the cases, even if not in all cases where other kinds of help from outside will become necessary. Marriages will have to be founded again where such breaches occur and the only solution is for each to forgive, to forget, resolve to trust, and make the best of a sorry thing.

The returning soldier who has children will, aside from all this, have the problem of reinstating himself as a father and as a manager of his home. The children may have gotten attached to their mothers and in some instances may give an unfriendly reception to the father. Furthermore, the wife has learned that she can manage a home and the children without her husband, and will also find it difficult to share the responsibility (and power) again. In case the wife has a masculine complex she may drive the husband from home by her attitude and unwillingness to put herself at the place where she was before the husband left. She should carefully examine herself in order to check such trends and to pave the way for herself and for her husband and for the children to restore the family life and give every member of the family the proper place.

The returning soldier who was married to a girl he met at some army post will have the ordinary adjustment of marriage to make, plus the trouble of deciding whose "home town" will be the postwar home, of making a mutual circle of friends, and getting to know his wife. I am confident that most of the hastily created marriages can be saved, especially if the young woman wants it and will apply good will and diplomacy and use, most of all, love to understand what her husband wants. One must expect more responsibility from those who stayed home than from a man who has the great task of establishing a home, finding work, and proving that he can be a soldier not only in the army but in civilian life, which I think is just as difficult if not more so.

Very frequently the wife at home has death-fantasies about her husband. I do not think of the inevitable thoughts that her husband might be killed in action, but I think rather of such death-fantasies which are followed by certain possibilities she might have in the case her husband dies, i. e., fantasies about another man she would marry and furthermore those 10,000 dollars of life insurance are certainly causing many horrifying hours to the poor wife. If these fantasies are overevaluated they may cause deep troubles to the wife and can make difficult her adjustment to her husband. One should take such fantasies as signs of inevitable weaknesses of humanity. They are evil thoughts which rear their ugly heads in all of us. If we do not repress them, if we do not ridicule them but realize their importance and unimportance, then we have checked them by our reason, by our critical instance and they fade away leaving no unpleasant traces in our mind. It is the wife's responsibility to face such thoughts, to judge them properly and settle them in that way.

The same refers to the husband. Especially when the couple is childless, the picture of his wife may fade away or pale in the husband's mind; or he might meet other girls, or fall in love with a pin-up-girl-picture, and the wish might arise to get rid of his wife by her death.

Usually such death-wishes do not remain conscious and just because they are unsuccessfully repressed might cause guilt-feelings and trouble the husband in showing his affections for his wife. It is your responsibility not to be alarmed when such thoughts cause troubles in the returning Serviceman. If there was any basis, love-basis, for the marriage he will warm up very soon, especially when he knows and learns from some authority that such thoughts were due to inevitable circumstances and at the given time they were natural.

For the sake of balanced personal relations we are forced to curb our aggressive urges and to transform them into useful personal and social actions. In wartime this transformation is greatly disturbed. The same individual in wartime is expected to hate and to kill aggressively. In many persons, due to their individual development, even killing in duty or cruelty forced upon him by circumstances might cause guilt-feelings. Any guilt-feelings make happy life impossible. I observed this in two grave cases: the guilt-feelings towards a defenseless enemy soldier. Furthermore, in some returning Servicemen the desire to preserve and enjoy aggression might persist, with the temptation to settle everyday personal difficulties by force and violence. If they meet resistance they might even find excuses for this aggressive action.

But I am sure that such a state of mind won't last long. It is your responsibility to know this and to understand it. Experiences after the first world war prove—strange as it may sound—that we are basically more inclined to love than to hate and the majority of the returning Servicemen will be more than happy to adapt themselves to an organized and peaceful life. Don't lose your head confronting difficulties. Your community offers you help to understand the difficulties and through this to train you in how to cope with them. If it should overtax your abilities and your strength you should turn for help to the different agencies of your community.

2.—THE RETURN TO FAMILY LIFE AND THE COMMUNITY

MRS. ELIZABETH BARRY, *Psychiatric Supervisor,*
Home Service Division, American Red Cross

Dr. Feldman has presented the typical reactions which take place in families who are separated by the circumstances of war. It is reassuring, I think, to discover that such emotions, many of which we do not like in ourselves, are natural and inevitable in human beings and are not necessarily an evidence of weakness or inadequacy in us. Separation does things to people; and when it occurs accompanied by danger and possible death it becomes a real threat to our security.

The element of change is basic in life experience. Nothing in the world of people can remain the same; but when we are part of a situation the changes take place so gradually that we are often not aware of them. Any break in the continuity of human relationship causes change to show up more sharply. We remember things as they were when we left; often we are unprepared for the differences when we return.

Separation does things, too, to our *memories* of things as they were. We tend to idealize and distort to heroic proportions the people and things we love. Particularly if the separation has brought insecurity and an urge to get back to former comforts, the memories of absent people and places sometimes bear little resemblance to reality.

Applying this now to the case of the returning Serviceman we see it operate in a very obvious fashion. Both the veteran and his family have longed for his return. He has dreamed of home and the ones he loves; they have prayed for him and looked often at his picture. He has done a superhuman job under the spur of remaining alive to get back to his loved ones; they have lived for the day when he will. Meanwhile, all the shortcomings of both are forgotten in the minds of the other, and they anticipate a reunion that will be perfect.

But actually what happens? The boy comes home to find that the house is smaller than he remembered and a lot of things about it get on his nerves. While he had been bunking with 50 other men in stuffy and rocking below-deck quarters he dreamed of the comfort of his own room, the solid feeling of his own bed under him, and the luxury of sheets and a pillow. When he first comes back to that room it may seem strange rather than familiar. The bed is too soft; he can't stand the pillow and he keeps listening for the sounds of his snoring shipmates. The silence presses down on him and he can't relax. He gets up and prowls around, knowing that it will disturb the family but unable to curb the impulse.

We have noted, in our observations of family anxiety about returning men, the tendency to *look* for abnormalities and to interpret small things in large terms. For instance there was the mother who was considering psychiatric care for her 19-year-old veteran son because he sat for hours in the bathtub, drove the family car recklessly and ate quantities of hot cereal. His behavior did not seem difficult to understand when she told us that he had been in the combat zone for many months, eating cold food out of a mess kit and bathing when it was possible, under a rigged up shower. We were not sure that he drove a jeep, but doubtless he had ridden in them, and in any event there were probably no traffic rules where he had been.

In the category of indulging pleasures too long deprived, is the "problem" of lying in bed in the morning. While in some instances that

may be symptomatic of a developing mental illness, and if it becomes increasingly apparent should be referred for medical advice, in most cases it seems to be a repudiation of "falling out" on signal and lining up for inspection. It would seem best to ignore it for a while and then approach it with the veteran as a handicap to his civilian responsibilities rather than as a casualty of his war experience.

On a deeper and more serious level is the misunderstanding that we have seen between very young veterans and their protective families, and between married men and the wives who have held the fort alone in husbands' absence.

With the former, a great deal of difficulty can be analyzed again on the theory of change which I mentioned earlier. A typical example would seem to be Ralph who left home at 17 to join the Navy and returned at 19 after many real combat experiences. He had been a school boy when he left; his letters from foreign parts were still rather childish and immature; and he expressed the real homesickness he felt. All this had left the family quite unprepared for the return of an experienced, grown man. In the mutual exuberance of the homecoming no cloud appeared in the sky; but within a few days the trouble started. The boy became restless, impatient, profane on occasion, and incorrigible in many ways. He had little, if any, respect for his father's opinions and came almost to blows with him when the father refused to let him drive the family car. The excuse was gas rations, but really—the boy knew it—it was because he never had driven it when at home before and it seemed risky to let him do it now. A major crisis developed over the question of his refusal to say where he was going and with whom. He stayed out later than he ever did before and he now came in occasionally with liquor on his breath.

In considering this kind of situation I don't mean to minimize the adjustment the family faces. Undeniably these boys are objects of real concern and anxiety for they *are* in some danger and they are not easy to handle. But maybe the problem will work out better if the family aligns its viewpoint more closely with the boy's. These youngsters have been through experiences in their short lives that most people, thank God, never have to face. They have been rudely snatched out of the cocoon of family protection and made to stand on their own feet almost overnight; taught to hate and to kill, and to develop skills in self-preservation that are scientific and cold. It has not been a gentle or mellowing experience; they can't be expected to come tripping out of it with drawing room manners. The fundamental difference is that they are no longer children; they have grown up, artificially but permanently, and they expect to be treated as adults. The unfortunate thing is that they are not yet fully mature in judgment and reason and therefore they need guidance; but it

must be given subtly and without threat to their adult status. In Ralph's case the family was at first hurt and bewildered and finally angry. They tried to "break him to harness" as the father put it, and tension rose to such a pitch that if he had a job Ralph would leave. He had had one job but found himself constantly at odds with the foreman so he finally quit in anger and had not found re-employment when he came into our office.

Sparing you the details of the case treatment, I'll tell you the highlights of what happened. Both father and mother were willing to talk about it and anxious for suggestions. They found it hard to relax their supervision because he was still a child to them but by degrees certain compromises were worked out. Instead of putting his opinions against his father's he now was given some voice in the family affairs, his opinion was consulted in family decisions, and he was given some feeling of responsibility for the group. Father capitulated on the car question easily, and then found that when nobody asked him where he was going the boy was apt to tell them. Another job failed the same as the first. It was becoming apparent that being "bossed" had some connotation for Ralph that set up resistances in him and led to angry scenes. He was finally persuaded to take advantage of the educational opportunities under the G.I. Bill and was enrolled in a technical school which he enjoyed and where he could work for an employer as part of the school plan. In this way he seemed able to accept supervision again and will leave his course equipped practically and emotionally for the real adult task of earning a living.

With the wives, the problems are different in symptoms but seem to require the same basic medicine—understanding, patience, imagination, tact, and love. Many wives have had an extremely difficult job to do in the husband's absence. There were financial worries, planning for the children if she took a job outside the home, the loneliness of the house without a man in it, the adjustments to new and often crowded living conditions if she doubled up with another wife and the probable strain if she tried to live with her own parents again or with her in-laws. Most of them are naturally looking forward to a surcease from their present troubles when husband comes home.

It has been with great shock, disappointment, and resentment that some wives found they could not let go just yet. Husband came home, but not to relieve wife of her burdens; in fact he seemed almost unaware that she had fought a war of her own in his absence, and he was maddeningly slow in taking hold of his responsibilities. No one can deny the right we wives have to feel that our job was hard too and maybe we should not be expected to make all the concessions. The argument on the

other side and the weightier one is that our war was fought on familiar grounds, among friends with most of the comforts to which we are accustomed. Our dislocation was not so complete or painful nor our experiences so alien, and besides nature has endowed women with greater powers of sympathy and protectiveness, greater sensitivity and tact, and readier ability to demonstrate their love. And so to the woman falls the job of carrying on until the men have found their civilian legs again.

One girl whom we knew had had to take full responsibility for finding a house in which they could reestablish a home, transact all the business involved, and do the settling. The veteran seemed to react with irritability and moodiness if she tried to draw him into it. For a while he was away from the new home much in the evening. When in time things straightened out and they both enjoyed it and each other again, the wife told us she regretted not having had the new home ready before he arrived. She realized he had felt insecure in not having a home; was afraid of the task of doing something about himself and unable to take hold because he was out of practice. Therefore, she had not nagged nor blamed or felt sorry for herself, and when he was ready to take the reins again she was able to hand them over. He was fortunate in having such a wife. Her own emotional balance had allowed her to read into the situation something of his feeling, and through tact and love she rebuilt his security. The other side of the picture is the wife whose wartime experiences outside the home have been so satisfying that she resents giving them up. A job, with the mental stimulation and widened social contacts, has been a new and welcome change from the household routine and she is reluctant to subside again into the comparatively unexciting role of housewife. Possibly then the veteran becomes threatened in his role as head of the family; and unless the wife can relinquish her choice to his greater need there may be a period of great unhappiness for them both. Now you may be thinking that you're wrong if you do and wrong if you don't; but you *will* know what to do if you approach it unselfishly and try to understand *your* veteran entirely.

While most of the ripples can be smoothed out with a delicate touch in the home, the more serious maladjustments need to be recognized and put into skilled hands for treatment. The harsh experiences, severe physical strain and prolonged nervous tension will do extensive damage in some cases. With them the "way back" is harder and longer. If the family accepts the need for treatment early, valuable time is saved that may mean much to his cure. I am thinking of the young man whose family bent every effort to understand and meet the changes in his personality, following his return from the South Pacific. He was extremely depressed, tearful and lethargic, questioning why he should have lived while his

buddies died. He could recapture none of his old enthusiasm even for his music which had been his hobby and was very guilty about his inability to "snap out of it" and go to work. The family did all the right things but still couldn't reach him. The boy himself came to us asking for psychiatric help, and through a referral to Strong Memorial and Dr. Jaenike, he was hospitalized and treated for a few weeks and left the hospital so improved as to be almost unrecognizable as the same boy. He promptly applied for veteran educational benefits and is now studying at one of the universities. His condition had been a real mental illness requiring professional treatment. There are in the community competent physicians and social workers who are experienced, trained and anxious to help. Use them when you need to.

There are unfortunately very few rules-of-thumb that can be learned and applied to insure that all situations come out right side up. We can speak with more authority about the "don'ts" than about the "do's." As Dr. Feldman said, the outlook is hopeful where there is love and a desire to help. The other basic element is time. Those three things together are able to counteract much of the ravages of combat and the damage done by separation.

On the "don't" side we stress these things—

1. Don't expect him to come home unchanged. It is not possible.
2. Don't point out his differences. He is only too aware of them.
3. Don't ask questions but be ready to listen when he wants to talk and don't be too shocked at what he tells you.
4. Don't find fault and nag when he doesn't conform to expected patterns.
5. On the other hand don't coddle him or postpone his assuming civilian responsibility again.
6. Don't be worried about uncertainty of purpose. He has to build a new life and it is confusing.
7. Don't feel sorry for yourself. He is bound to be more uncomfortable than you.

In closing I'd like to mention some of the literature that has been published on the subject. It is heartening, I think, to discover, in almost every popular magazine, at least one article dealing with some phase of the ex-soldier's future. For instance, the February, 1945, issue of Ladies' Home Journal had two articles, one on combat fatigue in which the wife's role is demonstrated and another by Woller who writes in general about the family's job with the veteran. Mr. Woller also has a book, "The Veteran Comes Back," that has received wide acclaim. Another is Dr. George Pratt's "Soldier to Civilian." In the realm of fiction is Niven Bush's recent best-seller, "They Dream of Home."

There is certainly a very widespread interest in knowing what to do for these boys.

Like Solomon we should pray for the gift of an "understanding heart." But where love is there is security, and with those two assets, time will do much of the rest.

3.—CHILDREN IN THE POSTWAR FAMILY

DR. EXIE E. WELSCH, *Former Director, Rochester Guidance Center*

These have been tense, anxious times in which to rear children in view of the complexity of recent years. War creates few new problems, but it does sharpen and bring into bold relief pre-existing problems either at home or in the community.

One essential problem during the war years has been to insure as healthy growth for children as possible, utilizing the good things that have developed and handling and minimizing the difficult ones.

What are the fundamental things that help a child grow up healthily? The most basic need is that the child be loved by his parents and by those around him, fully and genuinely.

The following is a brief description of children's needs from one age period to another:

From birth to two years, the child needs essentially love and physical care. From two to six, he needs love, security, the feeling of being wanted, and an opportunity for companionship with others his age. The age period from six to twelve requires the child's knowledge and security of love at home, greater social opportunities in order to learn how to get along with ever-widening social groups. During this period gang activities are common. Children want to be with others like themselves. It is during this period that the child is finding himself as a person in relation to others. From the age twelve on through adolescence, the child still needs the love and security of home, to know that his family are understanding and there to help when things get tough on the outside, to have the opportunity for much broader social contacts with other boys and girls than he has had heretofore. Each of these periods merges with the next. The transition from one to the other is never sudden for growth is a continuous process.

How has war-time affected this bird's eye view of the growth process? What of the effect with father gone and mother working?

In the age group from birth to two, the child's needs remain the same during war, peace, or any other time.

From the age two to six, there is little material change. The child still needs essentially love, security, and a feeling of being wanted by his

mother and other adults close to him. Nursery school has been afforded this age group which insures a well planned experience for first social contacts outside the home. Many children have profited immeasurably from this nursery school experience for it meets an important prerequisite for healthy growth.

A child's chief insecurity may be why father is gone. Some children feel that father being away means that he has rejected them, wanted to leave the home, and may never come back. The father's absence should be clarified for the child in simple terms that he will understand.

In the ages six to twelve, the child's needs are the same as far as being sure of love at home is concerned. His need for gang activities is the same. However, the form of the activities changes with the tenor of the times, for children are realists.

In the age group from twelve through adolescence, the child needs to know fundamentally still that he has the full backing of his family. He needs social contacts and opportunities for his maturing personality. During the war social contacts have had to be essentially with the same age group, whereas in peacetime the teen-age group tends to look to the next older group for guidance and ideas.

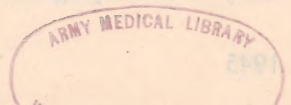
Adolescents, too, are realists. They have tended to assume jobs with a great deal of responsibility. Organized recreational activities for adolescents have been very important. The Teen Canteens, have been of great assistance as a social outlet for active adolescents. Because they meet a real need for adolescent social growth, they should continue.

Adolescents have also shown a tremendous interest in world affairs. They kept up on the course and meaning of the war as well, and in some cases, better than the adults. They have developed a perspective far beyond the confines of their own homes, schools, or even communities. This augurs well for their sense of perspective when they assume more adult responsibilities.

Adolescents have also taken a keen interest in vocational training as stimulated by the war. These opportunities have in the past years been expanded in our schools.

We should maintain and continue the development of such facilities as group activities, Teen Canteens, expanded educational programs, job opportunities, in order to prevent delinquency and to help adolescents find their place in a changed society.

What are some of the circumstances around the father who returns to his family? There will be babies whom fathers have not seen. Thus, the family structure will have changed importantly. Young children whose fathers have been away for some time will not know their father as a person. The child does not automatically accept parents. Parents and



family ties become important to the child as they have been his chief source of love and security in everyday living. So, both the child and the father will need a little time to become re-acquainted. Some children at first may quite reject the father, believing that he does not belong there, for the child is used to only mother and himself. In such instances a little more time will be required. It is important that both parents understand this natural tendency, otherwise they may get unnecessarily upset at their child's initial reaction to the homecoming. Without this understanding it could be especially hard for the father who has looked forward to coming home to a devoted family.

Similarly, one sees that the child has had mother all to himself these months or years, therefore does not want to share her with anyone else. It is this that becomes the basis for the child's hostility to father upon his return. Over a period of time, however, the child will sense that his father loves him too, and that he does not lose mother completely to him even though he now has to share her. All of this takes time, which is the essential point.

As for working mothers, has the solidity of family structure been jeopardized? It is not the absence from home per se that is the essential criterion. If the mother loves the child and the child knows it and is secure in that love, it is not essential that mother be with the child twenty-four hours a day to reaffirm it. A child knows when he is loved and knows it even when mother is out of the home, whether she is shopping or working.

Absence of a loved father, like a loved husband, cannot be fully met by substitutes. The foregoing are devices to help make it bearable and to create something tangible and purposive in our lives and that of the children while father is gone. With mother and children of all ages loving and doing things for the common objective of bringing father home, or of insuring family security for the future once he comes home, a warmth and unity to family feeling can be created that will be very satisfying and will serve to weld the family group together.

In summary then, we see that the war has created few new problems. It has, however, sharpened and brought into bold relief pre-existing problems either at home or in the community. One sees that all processes are speeded up. Those that were already problems or contained weakness became more so. Those that were fundamentally sound have been strengthened and extended in many valuable areas. It is important that we see both, and, especially, that we continue the trends of the latter which will help to secure our hopes for a peaceful development in a democratic post-war world, one which will insure that the children of today may grow up to be solid, responsible citizens, capable of assuming their share of responsibility in developing the best of the fruits of this war.